THE ENTRANCING LIFE

J. M. BARRIE

EDINBURGH
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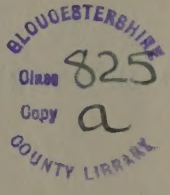

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I was uplifted — how could it be otherwise?—when I found that my Alma Mater wanted me to come back for another course. But now that the lightnings are upon me I am riven with misgivings. What have I dared. Oh, why left I the eyry of a solitary to go wandering in the great unquiet places. This College of renown—for wherever I find myself to-day I feel that I am in the old College; these walls dissolve, it is more like Masson's lecture-room, Campbell-Fraser raises his beard again, I hear Blackie singing—what has my old College been about in remembering

me, she who was once so noted for her choice of pilots? All I can say to you in my defence is, yours the wite for having me.

My anxious desire is to follow, very humbly as needs must, in the ways of my illustrious predecessor, Lord Balfour. That word has a tang to it that is sweet to the Scottish ear. I once had an argument, across the waters that lie between us and Samoa, with Robert Louis Stevenson about which was the finest-sounding Scottish name. He voted for one who was a kinsman of his, Ramsay Traquair. But I thought, and still think, that Balfour is better. How like our great Chancellor to have the name as well as all the rest. I first saw him here, I mean in the old College, in my

student days. He was addressing one of the University Societies on Philosophic Doubt; I cannot now recall with certainty which society, but it was the one I tried to become a member of, and they would not have me. However, I did contrive an entry that night, and the abiding memory is the dazzling presence of him, his charm; though, as Dr. Johnson never said, is there any Scotsman without charm? Lord Balfour's charm has been talked of by some as if it was the man himself; but oh no, it was only his seductive introduction to us, playing around him, perhaps to guard against our ever getting nearer to 'the man himself.' It still played around him when he faced the blasts in his country's cause. It loved the great adventure. Did you ever notice

how much ground he covered with his easy stride? It was so also with the stride of his mind. So many offices did he adorn. I was once speaking to him about some past event, and he said, 'Yes, I remember that—I was Prime Minister at the time—or was I?—at any rate, I was something of that kind.' So light apparently his knapsack. I have seen him, towards the end, writing the memoirs of his early days that have just been published. It was in one of the loveliest of English gardens, and he was reclining, under a great tulip tree, on a long chair, swallows sailing round, jotting it down as if the life and times of Arthur Balfour were only another swallow flight. As for myself, I vowed, as the alarming day of the august ceremony drew near, to

model my installation address on his : and on sitting down to read it, I found he had never made one. Instead, I see him to-day smiling charmingly at my predicament.

The University is not now as it was when I matriculated. Even on that day the old College, which perhaps never wore an alluring beam of welcome on her face, seemed so formidable that a famous Edinburgh divine, Dr. Alexander Whyte, had to accompany me to her awful portals and thrust me in. For some time I hoped he would do this every day. I learn from the *University of Edinburgh Journal*, itself a notable growth, that since ten years after they got rid of me (they did not put it in that way) seventeen new chairs have been added. Many vast academic depart-

ments have arisen. The methods of lecturing, of examinations, have been overhauled. This magnificent Hall has sprung up, and all the avenues leading to graduation in it have been made appropriately stiffer and steeper. Unions and Hostels such as, alas, were not in my time, now give Edinburgh students that social atmosphere which seemed in the old days to be the one thing lacking; the absence of them maimed some of us for life. The number of students has increased by over a thousand. Perhaps greatest change of all, Woman — yes. 'Female forms whose gestures beam with mind.' What a glory to our land has this University been since the first acorn, when one man — but what a man — Principal Rollock, did all its work single-handed

near by the site of the Kirk of Field. No wonder that we in gratitude have erected a monument to him and called a chair after him. Or have we? I learn now, for history sleepeth not, that the Kirk of Field is famous for a marital rumbling close by, in which the aim of a husband was to blow up Mary Queen of Scots. That is the new theory. A more fitting one for us would be that some fearful Scot, himself on fire for a degree, made that explosion to clear the ground for a University.

Whoever was responsible, a Queen or a Prince, or Andrew Soutar, M.A., a fire was lit that will last even longer than the controversy. Since that small beginning, Edinburgh of a daughter, the University has risen nobly to the

grapple ; she has searched the world for the best everywhere, to incorporate it in her own. How parochial if she had done otherwise. And now so much has been accomplished that one may ask what remains to do. It is easier to cry 'Onward' than to say whither. We might go onward till we got clean out of Scotland. Many of our students are from across the Border, they come from every civilised land ; and it is our proudest compliment, for it means that they think they get something here which is not to be got elsewhere. They are all welcome so long as we can contain them, and so long as they are satisfied that what is best for us is also best for them. But our universities must remain what our forebears conceived with such great travail, men of the

smiddies and the plough, the loom and the bothies, as well as scholars, they must remain, first and foremost something to supply the needs of the genius of the Scottish people.

Those needs are that every child born into this country shall as far as possible have an equal chance. The words 'as far as possible' tarnish the splendid hope, and they were not in the original dream. Some day we may be able to cast them out. It is by Education, though not merely in the smaller commoner meaning of the word, that the chance is to be got. Since the war various nations have wakened to its being the one way out; they know its value so well that perhaps the only safe boast left to us is that we knew it first. They seem, however, to be setting about the work with

ultimate objects that are not ours. Their student from his earliest age is being brought up to absorb the ideas of his political rulers. That is the all of his education, not merely in his academic studies but in all his social life, all his mind, all his relaxations ; they are in control from his birth, and he is to emerge into citizenship with rigid convictions which it is trusted will last his lifetime. The systems vary in different lands, but that seems to be their trend, and I tell you they are being carried out with thoroughness. Nothing can depart more from the Scottish idea, which I take to be to educate our men and women primarily not for their country's good but for their own, not so much to teach them what to think as how to think, not preparing them to give as

little trouble as possible in the future but sending them into it in the hope that they will give trouble. There is a small group of the Intelligentsia very much afraid of any such creed, because its members are so despondent about their fellow-creatures. They are not little minds, they contain some of the finest brains in the country, but they are as gloomy as if this were their moulting season. They think their land may endure a little longer if the new generations are plied with soporifics. All they ask of us, especially of youth, is a little all-round despair. No more talk about hitching your waggon to that star. Few of us have waggons, and there are no stars.

How do you like it, you new graduates? Are those the resilient notions

you are carrying away with you in your wallets? Is it Lochaber no more for you? I don't believe it. The flavour cannot have gone out of the peat. The haggis can still charge uphill. I 'll tell you a secret. Have you an unwonted delicious feeling on the tops of your heads at this moment, as if an angel's wing had brushed them half an hour or so ago? It did—I speak from memory; and it carried with it a message from your University: 'All hopelessness abandon, ye who have entered here.' She trusts your wallets contain, as her parting gift to you, 'those instruments with which high spirits call the future from its cradle.'

She hopes that you are also graduating in the Virtues, in which, being an old hand at granting academic honours,

she knows better than to expect more than a pass degree. It is quite possible that your time here has done you not good but harm. If it has made you vain, for instance, of your accomplishments, too solemnly serious about their magnitude. I have seen Lord Haldane sitting with his head in his hands because he knew so little. Mr. Einstein has a merry face; he looks at us almost mischievously, and no wonder. Has your learning taught you that Envy is the most corroding of the vices and also the greatest power in any land? Are you a little more temperate in mind? have you more charity? do you follow a little better, say about as much as the rest of us, the dictates of kindness and truth? You may be very clever, destined for the laurel, and have smiled at

the unfortunates who fought for bursaries or to pass in, failed, and had to give up their dear ambitions; but if their failures taught them those lessons, they may have found for themselves a better education than yours.

You may discover in the end that your life is not unlike a play in three acts with the second act omitted. In the neatly constructed play of the stage each act moves smoothly to the next, they explain each other; but it may not be so with yours, it is not so with many of us. In less time than I hope you now think possible, for I would have you gay on your graduation morning, you will be far advanced in the final act. There has been a second, your longest one, but how little record you have probably kept of it. All you

know may just be that this man or woman you have become is not what you set out to be in the days of the Firth of Forth. That may not even damp you much, if prosperity has made you gross to some old aspirations. You may not know how or when the thief came in the night, nor that it was you who opened the door to him. But something bad got into you in the middle act, and lay very still in you till it was your familiar. Slowly, furtively it pushed, never stopped pushing slowly, for it never tires, until it had you out and took your place. You may sometimes roam round the earthly tenement that once contained you, trying to get back. Perhaps you will get back. That sometimes happens. We may hope, however, that by the grace of

God what entered was something good. All I can assure you is that in that second act, now about to begin, something will get in which is either to make or to destroy you. It has got in already if an uphill road dismays you. Would you care to know my guess at what is the entrancing life? It sums up most of what I have been trying to say to-day for your guidance. Carlyle held that genius was an infinite capacity for taking pains. I don't know about genius, but the entrancing life, I think, must be an infinite love of taking pains. You try it.

One word more. The 'Great War' has not ended. Don't think that you have had the luck to miss it. It is for each of you the war that goes on within ourselves for self-mastery. Those robes

you wear to-day are your Khaki for that war. Your graduation day is your first stripe. Go out and fight. Don't come back dishonoured as in many ways I do.

Are we not all conscious, fitfully, of a white light that hovers for a moment before our lives? It comes back for us from time to time to the very gasp of our days. Comes back for us—to take us where? So quickly fades, as if unequal to its undertaking, like an escaped part of ourselves. Is it a messenger from that star? Are stars souls? The inaccessible star. If any one of ours has reached his star, it was our Lister. The inaccessible friendly star. If we could follow the white light.

How I have been preaching. It is not usual to me. It is against the

'stomach of my sense,' I feel that it has gone to my head. I look around for others to preach to. My eyes fall on the honorary graduates. I refrain with difficulty. For the present it is good-bye. I wish I was a little less unworthy of this gown. I will do my best.

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